

## Patient Information

# Vocal Fold Atrophy

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## What is Vocal Fold Atrophy?

Vocal Fold Atrophy is a condition where the vocal folds (also known as vocal cords) become thinner and weaker due to aging or other factors. This weakening reduces their ability to close properly, leading to voice changes such as breathiness, reduced volume, and vocal fatigue. It is most commonly seen in older adults but can also occur due to other medical conditions.

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## Symptoms of Vocal Fold Atrophy

- Hoarseness or breathy voice
  - Reduced vocal strength and projection
  - Vocal fatigue or tiredness after speaking
  - Difficulty being heard in noisy environments
  - Increased effort required to speak
  - A weak or unstable voice
  - Frequent throat clearing
  - Sensation of air escaping while speaking
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## Causes of Vocal Fold Atrophy

Vocal Fold Atrophy occurs due to:

- **Aging (Presbyphonia)** – Natural thinning of the vocal folds as part of the aging process.
  - **Hormonal changes** – Decreased levels of hormones that affect muscle strength (e.g., menopause, testosterone deficiency).
  - **Neurological conditions** – Diseases like Parkinson's disease or nerve damage affecting vocal fold function.
  - **Prolonged voice underuse** – Lack of vocal exercise can lead to muscle weakening.
  - **Chronic illness** – Conditions like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or neuromuscular disorders.
  - **Previous vocal fold injury** – Surgery, intubation, or trauma to the voice box.
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## Diagnosis

A specialist, such as an ear, nose, and throat (ENT) doctor or a speech-language therapist, will evaluate your symptoms. Diagnosis typically involves:

- A **voice assessment** to analyse pitch, loudness, and quality.
  - **Laryngoscopy or videostroboscopy** – A small camera is used to examine vocal fold movement and structure.
  - **Acoustic analysis** – Measuring voice quality, frequency, and airflow.
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## Treatment Options

Treatment aims to improve voice quality and function through various approaches:

### 1. Voice Therapy

A speech-language therapist can help strengthen the vocal folds and improve voice control through:

- **Vocal exercises** to improve closure of the vocal folds.
- **Breathing techniques** to support better voice production.
- **Postural and relaxation techniques** to reduce strain.

### 2. Medical and Surgical Interventions

If voice therapy alone is not effective, medical treatments may include:

- **Voice Injections (Vocal Fold Augmentation)** – Injectable fillers (e.g., hyaluronic acid, collagen) can add bulk to the vocal folds, improving their ability to close.
- **Thyroplasty** – A surgical procedure where a small implant is placed to help bring the vocal folds closer together.

### 3. Lifestyle and Voice Care Tips

- **Stay hydrated** – Drink plenty of water to keep vocal folds lubricated.
  - **Avoid smoking and alcohol** – These can dry out and irritate the vocal cords.
  - **Use a microphone if needed** – Reduces strain when speaking in large spaces.
  - **Take voice breaks** – Resting the voice can help prevent overuse.
  - **Speak with proper breath support** – Engage the diaphragm to avoid vocal strain.
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## Prognosis

With proper treatment, most people with vocal fold atrophy can significantly improve their voice quality and function. Early intervention with voice therapy and, if necessary, medical treatments can help restore confidence in speaking.

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## When to Seek Medical Help

If you experience persistent hoarseness, vocal weakness, or difficulty speaking for more than **two weeks**, consult an ENT specialist or speech-language therapist for an evaluation.

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## Summary

Vocal Fold Atrophy is a common condition, particularly in older adults, but it is manageable with the right treatment. If you have concerns about your voice, seek professional help to explore therapy or medical options that can enhance your vocal quality and daily communication.

**For more information, contact your ENT specialist or speech-language therapist.**